

Reinforcing Television Influence on Food Sufficiency Education in Post-COVID-19 Nigeria

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Abstract

Television broadcasting made a debut in Nigeria in 1959, precisely 33 years behind Europe that welcome the first public transmission in 1926. The importance of television as a development medium in nation-building cannot be undermined, hence, this article, a non-empirical study that methodologically employs thematic literature review to discuss the reinforcing influence of television for food sufficiency education in post-Covid-19 Nigeria. The pertinent literature was used to discuss the subject matter within the ambience of television on educating the consuming populace and farmers on how to improve food sufficiency – production, preservation and curbing of waste. This is thought out due to the Covid-19 lockdown that increased television audience. The researchers conclude that television can serve as a useful medium to educate stakeholders in food production and distribution, given its audio-visual and dynamic characteristics. The researchers, therefore, recommend that agriculture policymakers should consider using television to aggressively disseminate agricultural messages for food production in the post-COVID-19 Nigeria for food sufficiency.

Keywords: Reinforcing, Television, Food Sufficiency, Education, Post-COVID-19 Nigeria.

Introduction

All through history, the mass media have impacted on human activities in one way or the other. Beginning from the newspaper and to the radio era, the world population has always depended on the media for daily news information. Nigeria started television broadcast on October 29, 1959 as Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) under the Western Regional Government led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo as Premier. By the date of 1959, Nigeria has lagged behind Europe in television broadcasting by 33 years. Hyde writes, "By the 1980s, television had become the primary source of local, national and international news in most part of Europe and America", (Hyde, 2009, p.2). In Nigeria, irrespective of this late entrant, television as a mass medium became an influential source of news information in 1980 when the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) took over other state-owned television broadcast to create a network in broadcasting. The news then was accepted as most authentic even though burdened by government control. As network broadcast at 9pm, the same information is broadcast in all the then 19 and later 26 states NTA stations (Lasode, 1994). this dynamic soon changed by the issuance of licenses for private broadcasting.

The likes of Channels Television which was dedicated to just news and current affairs, came into being in 1995, followed by Africa Independent Television (AIT) which was launched in 1996, and now Arise News, in 2012. The big portion of researches conducted in Nigeria on the influence, role and or impact of media in development communication-related area has always been on the radio because of the perceived influence of radio on development. Though television is a more recent entertainment and information phenomenon in comparison to radio, newspaper, book, magazine, and film, its strength in setting agenda and changing peoples' perception is immense. Nwachukwu (2011) describes the strength of television as a medium with creativity and impact, with dramatic and life-like representations of inanimate objects as well as embellishment and manipulation of life. In a similar vein, Iwuchukwu (2016) describes television as a selling machine that establishes itself as the most effective selling medium. Other research findings have also shown that television has become a popular source of information because of its audio-

visual power which makes it easy to convey information, explaining trends and possibilities and educating people, Burzyńska, Binkowska-Bury & Januszewicz, 2015 cited in (Egielewa, Ate & Ngonso, 2020). Another unique characteristic of television is that it is a medium, which allows for the transmission of live events as they unfold. Television is also seen as a domestic medium that allows viewers to view movie programmes from the comfort of their rooms without going to the cinema. Television programmes are usually targeted at homes because families normally come together to watch programmes particularly at the lockdown and stay at home period of the covid-19 pandemic, when families are forced to stay together.

The novel COVID-19 is assumed to be a new strain of coronavirus that was discovered in China in the last two months of 2019. According to UNICEF record (2020) "Corona viruses are part of the large group of zoonotic viruses which are transmitted from animals to humans through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person, that is generated through coughing and sneezing and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus". Its symptoms are similar to that of malaria, a common disease in Sub-Saharan Africa. The symptoms may include fever, cough, pneumonia, breathing difficulties, and kidney failure. President Muhammadu Buhari inaugurated the Nigerian Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 on the 9th of March 2020 (<https://statehouse.gov.ng/covid19/>) to oversee the prevention, treatment and general management of the virus. The PTF has maintained international best practices in an attempt to curb the spread of the disease by recommending among others; social distancing, wearing of face mask, closure of night clubs cinemas and crowd attracting entertainment venues operating day or night, and other social events including burial ceremonies, fumigation of market and other public places, closure of schools and worship centres, regular hands washing in running water, and the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

This deadly disease that emerged in China and later to Europe, America, and to other parts of the world struck Nigeria in mid-March, 2020. Corona virus is no respecter of man, size status, religion or race. In fact, the super rich seem to have been more infected than the downtrodden the world over (Ayoma, 2020). This is well captured by a Gwari man, responding to questions in an interview conducted by TVC news on 2020 world indigenous

day 2020 celebration. He calls the corona virus, *Taikiti*. When asked what it was, he interpreted it as “a disease without respect.” President Muhammadu Buhari on March 29, 2020, declared a total lockdown in the Federal Capital Territory, Lagos, and Ogun States. Several state governments including Rivers, Edo, Kano, Enugu, Bauchi, Kaduna, and Kwara states also declared total lockdown at separate times. The ban, which includes a social association, mobility, non-essential economic, and leisure activities deny the people opportunities to access the public cinemas (Obadofin, 2020). This development afforded many households who have engaged in endless rat race in Nigeria to have time to watch television programmes to keep abreast of the goings-on about the virus.

Television viewing time also increased during the COVID-19 lockdown, showing the impactful nature of television on the Nigerian audience. In recent research conducted during COVID-19 lockdown by Egielewa, Ate and Ngonso, 2020, the research findings showed that, “Nigerians doubled their viewership of TV programmes by 4 hours and more during the COVID-19 lockdown which kept them at home compared to the period before COVID-19. Male consumers against previous studies were the heaviest consumers of TV programmes during the period. Men constituted two-third of heavy consumers” (p.3). Johnson (2020) in her study also found that in the UK, as people are largely confined to their homes, television viewing sky-rocketed, as live broadcast viewership increased by 17% since Coronavirus lockdown. Another potential explanation for the association of increased hours of television viewing with Covid-19 was the increase in food intake. According to Borghese, Tremblay, Leduc, Boyer, Belanger, LeBlanc, Francis and Chaput (2015) in their research work, said that “Television viewing is associated with overconsumption of food in the current obesogenic environment. Specifically, high television viewing time has been reported to be inversely associated with fruit and vegetable consumption, and positively associated with consumption of energy-dense snacks and drinks, fast food and total energy intake” (p. 937). It has also been observed that many Nigerians have increased their food intake during this lockdown leading to fear of obesity. Whyte (2020) writes on how Nigerians without surprise have embraced weight loss and which seems to be on the increase running up to a high percentage of 60

since stay at home lockdown was enforced in April 2020. Conducting Google searches with phrases such as “fastest way to lose weight” and “how to burn belly fat” reveal this growing trend as social media platforms suggest physical exercises as one major way to combat the dreaded Coronavirus. Visits to all places including social calls were greatly restricted, and even going out for grocery shopping was done sporadically. Whyte (2020) further noted that,

The frequency of people going to retail and recreation centres as well as workplace visits decreased by around 35%. Movement in residential areas was up 21%. Considering that weight gain is generally caused by the combination of eating and a lack of exercise, one can see how the pandemic might increase obesity. The consumption expenditure report released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) gives us a look into food consumption in Nigeria from the ₦22.8 trillion spent on food in 2019, ₦4.6 trillion was on eating out. This accounts for the highest share in both food (20%) and total (11%) expenditure in the year. Top among the food items on the spending list of Nigerian households were starchy roots, tubers and plantains. (p. 1)

As the index cases increased, and lockdown remained, there was the very likelihood that television-viewing hour and food daily intake would have increased exponentially. As of June 14 2020, the Federal Government is yet to re-open schools and many other businesses such as the recreational and relaxation centres. The daily index record heightens this fear, which has been on the rise in most states of the country. These long viewing hours poses a perfect time to frame and sell the ideology of food sufficiency in post-covid-19 era by broadcasting programmes that engender agricultural produce, and the curbing of waste by cutting down on what we consume and preservation of the farm produce already in the market. <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>. Discussing food sufficiency goes beyond the idea of more to eat. On one hand, it is centred on production as in agricultural or farm produce as well as industrially processed foods which a lot of the time are produced and packaged from agricultural products for example, Noodles-Cassava; Biscuits, Bread-Wheat; Custard, Chicken feed-Maize; Vegetable oil-Maize, Pea-nut, Olive and Palm-kernel, Coconut, Chocolate-Cocoa, Sugar and sweets-Sugar Cane etc. On the other hand, food sufficiency could further be stretched to proper

preservation from one harvest season to another. This is what the researchers refer to as curbing waste, which includes cooking and consuming the minimal requirements for our bodies to forestall obesity. There are, however, general reservations on food sufficiency in Nigeria, and an interview respondent on Africa Independent Television (AIT) who says that Nigeria was lagging behind in food sufficiency as the country still engages in food importation corroborated this.

An Overview of Food Situation in Nigeria before and during COVID-19 Lockdown

Food is one of the basic physiological needs of the human being occupying the first position, followed by shelter with clothing coming last in the traditional list of human's basic needs. No human can survive without food. Although, Wikipedia writes derogatorily that "The basic needs approach is one of the major approaches to the measurement of absolute poverty in developing countries". Trying to treat the basic need to disparage a developing nation is a fallacy intended to malign third world nations. Food is the most crucial need of the human population because man cannot survive without food, and the scarcity of food leads to starvation and starvation indicates that there is poverty in a given community (Umolu & Egwa 2012). The indispensability of food to humanity is clearly seen during the 2020 lockdown the world over. A major concern was food palliatives distribution that did not give regard to creed, colour or societal affluence.

First, second and third worlds felt the pangs of hunger during the lock down. The world was preoccupied more with food, but there was hardly a mention of the other two basic needs – shelter and clothing. Even the hurry to reopen individual economies when it was obvious that the viral infection of covid-19 had not abated, was obviously necessitated by the strong desire to combat hunger. Before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria has been branded by The World Bank (2019) as one of the countries with the worst economy in West Africa, which is also an indication of lack of food for the ever-growing population, which was another negative report. The report indicates that: "Growth is too low to lift the bottom half of the population out of poverty. The weakness of the agriculture sector weakens prospects for the rural poor, while

high food inflation adversely impacts the livelihoods of the urban poor” (p.2).

According to Nwabuze, Ugwonno and Ngonso (2012), “...poverty is said to be a major factor that affects access to sufficient food in Nigeria which has led to household food insecurity where households are unable to obtain adequate food either through home production or food purchase” (p. 51). Obadofi (2020) also write to corroborate Nwabueze et.al position on food scarcity before COVID-19 and states there was already a scarcity of food supply for Nigeria’s growing population even before the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. According to the writers, since local production in the agricultural sector could not meet the demands of the 200 million people in the country, food importation becomes a necessity. They further said that estimated 100,000 tonnes of wheat were produced locally against an annual demand of over 3 million tones and the production of rice and fish, which is highly consumed amongst Nigerians still falls below the quantity demanded. According to Obadofi (2020) between 2006 and the first half of 2019, Nigeria had spent 38.24 billion naira on agricultural goods import to augment domestic production.

These goods include rice, sugar, wheat flour, fish, poultry, beef, and milk. Ojewale (2020), states that though there is a grand measure to curb the spread, the national lockdown had great economic effect that has led to tightening of credit access to farmers, limited access to inputs for farmers, limited access to transport services to transport food, and border closures limiting food imports. These constraints are beginning to have a ripple effect on food production and transportation, leading to a hike in the prices of commodities. The restrictions are negatively impacting on households’ means of livelihoods, specifically in urban areas, as federal and state governments implement lockdown measures and movement restrictions. These measures have also decreased both formal and informal trade across the country with a combined loss of household income. With less emphasis or monitoring of restrictions in the rural areas, the economic activities are still ongoing, but transporting the farm produce to the cities becomes the major economic problem confronting the rural farmers which have caused loss to most of their perishable goods and further impoverished them. Ojewale (2020) warns that:

Unless government pays more practical attention and less of rhetoric to agriculture in Nigeria, the country could be heading towards severe food crisis, post COVID-19 and possibly even before the pandemic is over. Some farmers have been unable

to harvest their crops from the farms, leading to losses, while others are unable to prepare for the planting season. In both cases, farmers are losing an opportunity to earn income, while Nigerians at large inch closer to a food crisis unless food production is ramped up. Some heads of farmer associations during the first session of a webinar series by the Guild of Nigerian Agriculture Journalists (GNAJ), lamented the inability to produce food, and losses being recorded by millions of smallholder farmers. (p.1)

It is also assumed that households in insurgency pruned areas such as Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, Benue, Plateau, Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto states may likely face hunger much longer than other states due to COVID-19 pandemic lockdown by the federal government.

Food Sufficiency: A Conceptual Appraisal

Food sufficiency is defined as a state of having enough food for the entire population of a country. It is a state of not having a shortfall in food supply. Food sufficiency is a situation where a country secure food for its citizenry. Food sufficiency is directly related to food security. The World Food Summit of 1996 cited in Nwabuze, Ugwunno and Ngonso (2012) conceived food security as existing when people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. Baer-Nawrocka and Sadowski (2019, p.7) state that: in practice, the main responsibility for food security and self-sufficiency is the agricultural sector, which is supported to a small extent by hunting and fisheries. The particularities of agriculture result from many factors, including the specific, multi-faceted interaction between the environment and human activity. This means the capacity to produce an adequate volume of agricultural raw materials is affected, on the one hand, by natural conditions (primarily including soil and climate) and, on the other, by anthropogenic factors, such as progress in organization and in technical, chemical and biological sciences.

As agriculture develops, the human impact becomes increasingly important, although the natural environment continues to play a major role. In that context, note that the scale of human intervention in food manufacturing processes is roughly measured with the amount of capital expenditure, i.e. it depends on the

economic development level of a country. According to (FAO, 1996) cited in Minot and Pelijor (2010) "Food security is the access for all people at all times to have enough food for healthy, active life" (p.3). Minot and Pelijor in contrast see food sufficiency as been able to meet consumption needs (particularly for staple food crops) from own production rather than buying or importing.

Capitalizing on the Powerful Influence of Television for Food Sufficiency Education

Television is seen as having a powerful influence on its audience partly because of its audio-visual advantage over and above other forms of mass media such as the radio, newspaper, books, billboard and magazine. Television is also called glamorous medium. According to Baba (2012) ...while radio has sound, television content includes both sound and visuals. This audio-visual character of television makes it a magic medium, which allows us to watch the world from our drawing rooms. This powerful visual nature helps television to create vivid impressions in our minds, which in turn leads to emotional involvement. The audio visual quality also makes television images more memorable (p.1).

These attributes of television give television so much advantage over other forms of mass media and make it more preferable for education and training of farmers and all stakeholders in food production, distribution and preservation. Food sufficiency requires the education of stakeholders in the food production and distribution business. Experiences during the lockdown occasioned by a global pandemic, COVID-19 have shown that human resources and proper education are key factors behind food sufficiency in Nigeria. This requires that all stakeholders involved in food production and distribution must constantly be updated with information that will enable them to build their capacity to the extent that they can provide food in an emergency situation. This further implies that training and retraining of farmers, young and future farmers, agriculture researchers and information disseminators such as agriculture extension workers and journalists are indispensable. According to Isiaka (2012) "Information, education and training allow farmers to make use of new farming knowledge and technologies" (p.95). Isiaka also said that research shows that both formal education and non-formal training have a substantial effect on agricultural productivity. Tencanrd and Verner (2005) cited

in Didiugwu (2015) also corroborated Isiaka that, “Among the wide diversity of mass media, radio and television, due to their wide range of audience, have had an outstanding position for informal teaching point of view and are considered as the best cultural and educational media”(p.211). Umolu and Egwu (2012) write on the efforts of television stations in Nigeria in supporting the implementations of food production policy of the government in the past:

The impetus to increase food production became even stronger during General Ibrahim Babaginda’s regime that lasted from 1985 to 1993. The regime introduced programmes such as the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Company, the Agricultural Credit Scheme, and the Better life Programme. The various TV stations on their own joined the crusade for increased food production by producing programmes, which were geared towards the singular goal. There were programmes such as “Noma Jari” (NTA Jos); “Akoma Gona”(NTA, Akure); “Agbe”(NTA, Ibadan); “Better Farming”(BBS, Benin). These TV stations joined the crusade for sustainable food production as a result of the realization that the medium is a potent force in the dissemination of development information. Its potency is derived from the fact that communication, when properly packaged, can achieve three main objectives, which are to increase understanding for the recipient, the fact that communication, when properly packaged, can achieve three main objectives, which are to increase understanding for the recipient, fostering a feeling of oneness in pursuing common cause and enlarging the capacity of the people to contribute to their own development. (p.181)

Since food is a major human need, food sufficiency will certainly pose a major challenge at post-COVID-19. The import is that, greater crop yields, good preservation, effective processing, adequate packaging and effective and safe delivery of food to consumers are required. Rakotonanahary and Cao (2020) in their study found that lack of information and technology forces small farmers to resolve information asymmetry and manual cultivation during production process to boost living standards, and that policymakers need to raise productivity by ensuring that workers are well educated, have the tools they need to produce goods and services and have access to the best available technology (p.4).

Though the inability of the Nigerian farmers like others in Sub-Saharan region to produce enough food depends on many factors, poverty remains the key. They went further to state that "...in most low-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), poverty is above all a rural phenomenon. This poverty is often accompanied by the inability or incapacity of farmers to enhance their production" (p.4). Other factors include lack of information, innovation, technological tools, government support, improved seedlings and help of agricultural extension worker. This is where television education on food production will fill the gap. This also implies stakeholders' knowledge and information need to be upgraded. It is expedient for stakeholders in the food production and distribution to have sound knowledge about their roles as well as practices that are required for food production and distribution hence food sufficiency.

Reinforcement Theory of Mass Communication

Bandopahyay (2015) writes that "Reinforcement is a term used in behavioural analysis and in a specific kind of international behaviour change known as operant conditioning. It is a process of increasing the incidence of a measurable behaviour". (p.5) Psychologists have attributed this theory to B. F. Skinner. Reinforcement theory is claimed to be one of the oldest motivation theory. The theory further posits that behaviour is a function of its consequences, which means an individual develops behaviour after performing certain actions. In the field of psychology, four types of reinforcement have been identified which are: positive, negative, punishment and extinction. Reinforcement theory is also widely used in the field of mass communication. In the early 1940s, communication experts were interested in media effect studies. They were eager about how media messages affect human behaviour. Benard Berelson gave a shot, and he wrote, "Some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues brought to the attention of some kinds of people have some kinds of effects" cited in Baran (2002). Joseph Klapper took it up from there and in 1960 he studied the effect of the media messages where he found out that media messages have an effect on the human behaviour among other intervening or mediating variables. The idea was to challenge the earlier claims by media theorists that media messages are too

powerful and that human beings cannot escape from the bullet-like or magic-needle effect of the media messages. Klapper then put forth the reinforcement theory of the media in 1960.

According to Ukonu, Ani and Akhile (2015,p.12) Klapper “Formulated several generalizations on the effects of mass media. ...he found out that mass media ordinarily do not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effect, but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors and influences”. Klapper claimed that these mediating factors render mass communication a contributory agent in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions and they are selective exposure, selective perception and selective retention. These factors according to Rimón cited in Olley and Ogbemi (2012, p.165) occur when:

- These mediating factors are sure that they typically render mass media communication a contributing agent, but not sole cause in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions.
- On such occasions as mass communication does function in the service of change, one of two conditions is likely to exist, either the mediating effect of the media will found to be direct or the mediating factors, which normally favour reinforcement, will be found to be themselves impelling towards change.
- There are certain residual situations in which mass communication seems to produce direct effects or direct and of itself to serve certain psychological functions.
- Various aspects of the media and communication affect the efficacy of mass communication, either as contributing agents or agents of direct effect.

Conclusion

The researchers conclude that television can serve as a useful medium to educate stakeholders in the food production and distribution giving its uniqueness in news and information dissemination, audio-visual and dynamic characteristics. The hypodermic needle and magic bullet theories are deeply rooted in the mass medium of television. Because of its unique characteristics of employing audio and visual, and with the added apparatus film theory, the television demobilises its audience and propagate

its intended ideology in the minds of viewers, hence Lisenach describe the power of the medium with healthy respect that “Of all popular media, television illustrates the power of mass communication to inform, educate and influence the public. ... it is clearly obvious that both adults and children learn a great deal from watching television week after week”. Even Chief Obafemi Awolowo at the inauguration of WNTV Ibadan, Nigeria far Awolowo said TV was to “serve as a teacher, entertainer and stimulus to us all to transform Nigeria into a modern and prosperous nation”. This, Nigeria became but less attention was paid to agriculture particularly with the oil boom era.

The power of television could also be deduced from the fear entertained by NBC Acting Director-General, Armstrong Adachaba in the October 2020 #endsars peaceful protest by Nigerian youths, by imposing ₦3 million sanction each on AIT, Channels and Arise News television stations for continued transmission of footages from the protest ground, which energised other copycat protesters to unleash violence across Nigeria (*Premium Times*). With these, the power of television could be harnessed to educate farmers, on food production, shun old and bad practices and also educate farmers as well as consumers on how to preserve food to curb waste. The power of television on agriculture resonated in far-away Iran in the research of (Nazari & Hassan 2011, pp. 932), acknowledging that television is the “most important medium for communicating with the rural populations of developing countries”. They therefore urged different countries to take advantage of television in terms of informal education. This is also affirmed by other research works cited in this paper. For example, Rakotonanahary and Cao (2020, p.4) in their study found that “Lack of information and technology forces small farmers to resolve information asymmetry and manual cultivation during production process to boost living standards”.

Recommendation

The researchers recommends amongst so many issues beclouding Nigerian television programme priorities: That agriculture policy makers should consider using television to disseminate agricultural message for food production in the post-COVID-19 Nigeria for

food sufficiency. The erroneous idea that television is meant for the elite or upper class should be jettisoned, and emphasis should be placed on transmitting to educate the rural dwellers, with a focus on producing and preserving. This could rekindle the interest of even the elite to embark on agriculture. Government should not just pay lip services in their commitment to agricultural development in Nigeria. Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has the power to force stations in Nigeria to create agricultural programmes on private and public televisions by running agricultural programmes for at least 45 minutes 3 days a week. Infotainment or edu-commercials of 5 minutes could be employed also in the crusade for food sufficiency. Dramatists could be commissioned to write soap dramas like *Cock Crow at Dawn* of the 1980s with narrative centered on rural life and agriculture. Documentarists also could be commissioned to produce documentary on food sufficiency which borders on production, preservation and curbing waste

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